The Progressive Review

Nbr 304
February 1992

Why they hate Oliver Stone

In a hysterical stampede unusual even for the media herd, scores of journalists have taken time off from their regular occupations -- such as boosting the Democrats' most conservative presidential candidate, extolling free trade or judging other countries by their progress towards American-style oligopoly -- to launch an offensive against what is clearly perceived to be the major internal threat to the Republic: a movie-maker named Oliver Stone.

Stone, whose alleged crime was the production of a film called *JFK*, has been compared to Hitler and Goebbels and to David Duke and Louis Farrakhan. The movie's thesis has been declared akin to alleged conspiracies by the Freemasons, the Bavarian Illuminati, the League of Just Men and the Elders of Zion.

The film has been described as a "three hour lie from an intellectual sociopath." *Newsweek*, fresh from trying to crush inquiry into the October Surprise, ran a cover story headlined: "Why Oliver Stone's New Movie Can't Be Trusted." Another critic accused Stone of "contemptible citizenship," which is about as close to an accusation of treason as the libel laws will permit. Meanwhile, Leslie Gelb, with best *New York Times* pomposity, settled for declaring that the "torments" of Presidents Kennedy and Johnson over Vietnam "are not to be trifled with by Oliver Stone or anyone."

The attack began months before the movie even appeared, with the leaking of a first draft of the film. By last June, the film had been excoriated by the *Chicago Tribune, Washington Post,* and *Time* magazine. These critics, at least, had at least seen *something;* following the release of the film, NPR's Cokie Roberts took the remarkable journalistic stance of refusing to screen it at all because it was so awful.

Well, maybe not so remarkable, because the overwhelming sense one gets from the critical diatribes is one of denial, of defense of non-knowledge, of fierce clinging to a story that even some of the Stone's most vehement antagonists have to confess, deep in their articles, may not be correct.

Stephen Rosenfeld of the *Washington Post,* for example, states seven paragraphs into his commentary:

> That the assassination probably encompassed more than a lone gunman now seems beyond cavil.

If there was more than one gunman, it follows that there was a conspiracy of some sort and it follows that the Warren Commission was incorrect. It should follow also that journalists writing about the Kennedy assassination should be more interested in what actually did happen than in dismissing every Warren Commission critic as a paranoid. Yet, from the start, the media has been a consistent promoter of the thesis that Rosenfeld now says is wrong beyond cavil.

In fact, not one of the journalistic attacks on the film that I have seen makes any effort to explain convincingly what *did* happen in Dallas that day. They either explicitly or implicitly defend the Warren Commission or dismiss its inaccuracy as a mere historic curiosity.

Of course, it is anything but. Americans, if not the *Washington Post,* want to know what happened. And after nearly thirty years of journalistic nonfeasance concerning one of the major stories of our era, a filmmaker has come forth with an alternative thesis and the country's establishment has gone berserk.

Right or wrong, you've got to hand it to the guy. Since the 1960s, those trying to stem the evil that has increasingly seeped into our political system have been not suppressed so much as ignored. Gary Sick's important new book on events surrounding the October Surprise, for example, has not been reviewed by many major publications. The dozens of books on the subject of the Kennedy assassination, in toto, have received nowhere near the attention of Stone's effort. For the first time in two decades, someone has finally caught the establishment's attention, with a movie that grossed $40 million in the first three or four weeks and will probably be seen by 50 million Americans by the time the videotape sales subside. Further, by early January, Jim Garrison's own account of the case was at the top of the paperback bestseller list and Mark Lane's *Plausible Denial* had made it to number seven on the hard cover tally. Many of Stone's critics have accused him of an act of malicious propaganda. In fact, it is part of the sordid reality of our times that Hollywood is about the only institution left in our country big and powerful enough to challenge the influence of state propaganda that controls our lives with hardly a murmur from the same journalists so incensed by Stone. Where were these seekers of truth, for example, during the Gulf Massacre? Even if Stone's depiction were totally false, it would pale in comparison with

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The Progressive Review is published approximately 9 times a year. Formerly the DC Gazette. One year subscription: $14. Two year subscription: $25. Single copies: $2.00. The Review uses the news services of College Press Service, Pacific News Service, and the National Student News Service. The Review monitors both Compuserve and Peacenet.

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ISSN 0889-2202

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Review Index: Indices are available the Progressive Review and the DC Gazette for the following periods:
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the brutal consequences of the government's easy manipulation of the media during the Iraqi affair.

And, if movies are to be held to the standards set for *JFK,* where are the parallel critiques of *Gone With the Wind* and a horde of other cinemagraphic myths that are part of the American consciousness?

No, Stone's crime was not that his movie presents a myth, but that he had the audacity and power to challenge the myths of his critics. It is, in the latter's view, the job of the news media to determine the country's paradigm, to define our perceptions, to give broad interpretations to major events, to create the myths which guide our thought and action. It is, for example, Tom Brokaw and Cokie Roberts who are ordained to test Democratic candidates on their catechism, not mere members of the public or even the candidates themselves. It is for the media to determine which practioners of violence, such as Henry Kissinger and Richard Helms, are to be statesmen and which, like Lee Harvey Oswald and James Earl Ray, are mere assassins. It is their privilege to determine which of our politicians have vision and which are fools, and which illegal or corrupt actions have been taken in the national interest and which to subvert that interest. And this right, as Leslie Gelb might put it, is not to be trifled with by Oliver Stone or anyone else.

Because he dared to step on the mythic turf of the news media, Stone has accomplished something truly remarkable that goes far beyond the specific facts of the Kennedy killing. For whatever errors in his recounting of that tale, his underlying story tells a grim truth. Stone has not only presented a detailed, if debatable, thesis for what happened in Dallas on one day, but a parable of the next thirty years of America's democratic disintegration. For in these decades one finds repeated and indisputable evidence -- Watergate, Iran-Contra, BCCI, the war on drugs, to name just a few -- of major politicians and intelligence services working in unholy alliance with criminals and foreign partisans to malevolently affect national policy. And as late as the 80s, we have documentation from the Continuity in Government program that at least some in the Reagan administration were preparing for a coup d'état under the most ill-defined conditions.

It is one of contemporary journalism's most disastrous conceits that truth can not exist in the absence of revealed evidence. By accepting the tyranny of the known, the media inevitably relies on the official version of the truth, seldom asking the government to prove *its* case, while demanding of critics of that official version the most exacting tests of evidence. Some of this, as in the case, say, of George Will, is simply ideological disingenuousness. Other is the unconscious influence of one's caste, well exemplified by Stone critic Chuck Freund, a onetime alternative journalist whose perceptions changed almost immediately upon landing a job with the *Washington Post,* and who now writes as though he was up for membership in the Metropolitan Club. But for many journalists it is simply a matter of a childish faith in known facts as the delimiter of our understanding.

- Getting the JFK files released is certainly necessary, but one wonders what has happened to those files in the years since the assassination. As Norman Mailer put it, it's like leaving a Mercedes in the South Bronx for 20 years.

  Also, releasing the Warren Commission and House files would be just the beginning. The CIA has some 300,000 pages on the Kennedy murder and Army and Navy intelligence files would be crucial for information on possible top-level involvement.
- Rep. Louis Stokes, the former chair of the House Assassinations Committee, has urged an investigation into a mob lawyer's claim that Jimmy Hoffa told Santos Trafficante and Carlos Marcello to have Kennedy killed. Some think the assassination was too complicated to be just a Mafia hit. Further, it should be kept in mind that the mob-hit theory could be a useful fallback position for those wishing to cover up more extensive involvement in the killing.
- The media's depiction of Jim Garrison as a crazy publicity hound obscures certain key facts concerning his case. Among these are that the judge in the case said after defendant Clay Shaw died that he thought the jury should have found him guilty and later revelations that the CIA lied about Shaw's involvement with the agency.

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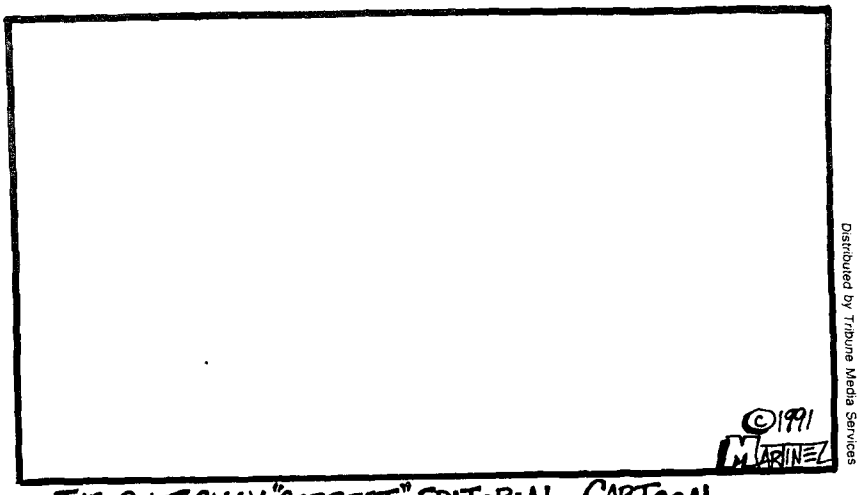
If intelligence means anything, it means not only the collection of facts, but arranging them into some sort of pattern of probability so we can understand more than we actually know.

Thus the elementary school child is inundated with facts, because that is considered all that can be handled at that point. Facts at this level are neatly arranged and function as rules to describe a comfortable, reliable world.

Beginning in high school, however, one starts to take these facts and interpret them and put them together in new orders and to consider what lots of facts, some of them contradictory, might mean. In school this is not called paranoia, nor conspiracy theory, but thought.

Along the way, it is discovered that some of the facts, a.k.a. rules, that we learned in elementary school weren't facts. I learned, for example, that despite what Mrs. Dunn said in 5th grade, Arkansas was not pronounced *R-Kansas.*

Finally, those who go to college learn that facts aren't anywhere as much help as we even thought in high school, for example when we attempt a major paper on what caused the Civil War.



THE POLITICALLY "CORRECT" EDITORIAL CARTOON.

To deny writers, ordinary citizens or even filmmakers the right to think beyond the perimeter of the known and verifiable is intellectually to send us back into a 5th grade world, precise but inaccurate, and -- when applied to a democracy -- highly dangerous. We have to vote, after all, without all the facts.

As Benjamin Franklin noted, one need not understand the law of gravity to know that if a plate falls on the floor it will break. Similarly, none of us have to know the full story of the JFK assassination to understand that the official story simply isn't true.

Oliver Stone has done nothing worse than to take the available knowledge and assemble it in a way that seems logical to him. Inevitably, because so many facts are unknown, the movie must be to some degree myth.

Thus, we are presented with two myths: Stone's and the official version so assiduously guarded by the media. One says Kennedy was the victim of forces that constituted a shadow government; the other says it was just a random event by an lone individual.

We need not accept either, but of the two, the Stone version clearly has the edge. The lone gunman theory, (the brainstorm of Arlen Specter, whose ethical standards were well displayed during the Thomas hearings) is so weak that even some of Stone's worst critics won't defend it in the face of facts such as the nature of the weapon allegedly used (so unreliable the Italians called it the *humanitarian rifle),* the exotic supposed path of the bullet, and Oswald's inexplicably easy return to the US after defecting to the Soviet Union.

In the end, David Ferrie in the movie probably said it right: "The fucking shooters don't even know" who killed JFK. In a well-planned operation it's like that.

For myself, I tend to believe that Stone is right about the involvement of the right-wing Cubans and the mobs, that intelligence officials participated at some level, that Jim Garrison was on to something but that his case failed primarily because several of his witnesses mysteriously ended up dead, and that a substantial cover-up took place. I suspect, however, that the primary motive for the killing was revenge -- either for a perceived détente with Castro or for JFK's anti-Mafia moves, and that Stone's Vietnam thesis is overblown. The top level conspiracy depicted is possible but, at this point, only that because the case rests on too little -- some strange troop movements, a telephone network failure and the account of Mr. X -- who turns out albeit to be Fletcher Prouty, chief of special operations for the Joint Chiefs at the time.

But we should not begrudge Stone if he is wrong on any of these points, because he has shown us something even more important than the Kennedy assassination: an insight

• *The Washingtonian* magazine has lost its ten-year movie critic over *JFK.* Pat Dowell quit after editor Jack Limpert spiked her 3 1/2 star mini-review (out of a possible 4 stars). Here is all that Dowell said: "If you didn't already doubt the Warren Commission report, you will after seeing Oliver Stone's brilliantly crafted indictment of history as an official story. Is it the truth? Stone says you be the judge." Said Limpert: "I didn't want to run a review that said it was a brilliant movie when I thought it was an extremely dumb movie." Limpert also complained that the movie "drew such a bizarre picture of Washington." *City Paper* quotes Dowell as replying: "He identifies the heart of Washington as the people accused of conspiracy -- the people at the CIA, the government, the policy elite -- instead of the people who suffer the effects of the policies." The film has been treated far more kindly by reviewers than by political journalists; even Stone bashing pubs like *Time, Newsweek* and the *Washington Post* allowed their critics to praise *JFK.*

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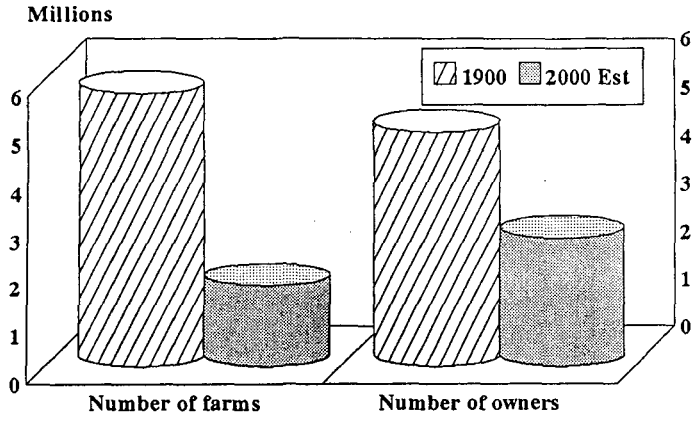
The disappearing farmer



Although farmland has increased slightly since 1900, both the number of farms and farm owners have declined markedly.

into repeated organized efforts by the few to manipulate for their own benefit a democracy made too trusting of its invulnerability by a media that refuses to see and tell what has been going on.

Just as the Soviets needed to confront the lies of their own history in order to build a new society, so America must confront the lies of the past thirty years to move ahead, Stone -- to the fear of those who have participated in those lies and to the opportunity of all those who haven't -- has helped to make this possible. -- *Sam Smith*

Rebuilding the unions

Peter Downs

The leaders of most American labor unions eliminated their internal opposition in the late 1940s or early '50s. So it has remained, but cracks -- as the recent Teamsters election indicated -- are appearing in those monolithic fronts.

In 1957, Clark Kerr, a professor at the University of California with close ties to organized labor, noted that with but a single exception (the International Typographical Union), unions are one-party governments. In the years following Kerr's observation, protests and criticisms of labor officials would occasionally flare and fade into silence. For the most part, however, one-party rule remained undisturbed. Like Kerr, union leaders argued that one-party rule was positive, as long as the party in power was "reasonably responsive to membership desires."

Suddenly, however, oppositionists and reformers are popping up in nearly every room of labor's house. A decade of concessions and declining living standards has given rise to reform movements in at least three national unions, and an unknown number of local ones. The presidents of four national railway unions suffered re-election defeats in the last year. The president of the mailhandlers' union was suspended from office. A reform candidate won the presidency of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters this year in that union's first free national elections; and so on.

Concessions plowed the field for reform movements, but interviews with rank-and-file workers in different unions and different cities indicates that it took more than concessions to promote the growth of their activism.

Kurt Kausler, for example, had been a member of UFCW Local 655 for 21 years before he decided to challenge the local's leadership. He has been a shop steward at Schnucks, one of the area's major supermarket chains, for 17 years. He opposed a concessionary contract in 1985 and grudgingly supported a wage freeze in 1988, all without going into opposition against local officers.

Two events after the contract pushed Kausler across the line to found an opposition group, called "Directions '90." First, the executive board gave itself a 10 percent raise, though the members themselves hadn't had a raise since 1984. Then, the president chose to retire and bequeath the office to his assistant, without an election. That was too much for Kausler and several other stewards. They concluded that the executive board had a "we/they" attitude towards the members, and that the actions of the officers could destroy the union. So, they began a campaign to reform the local.

Kausler's experience is typical of many union reformers. Mike Vitale, in Local 513 of the Hoisting Engineers, became an active reformer after a local business agent pleaded guilty to taking kickbacks and then got promoted to the International Union's staff. Tom Cota, a second generation Teamster in Sacremento, didn't begin to question the union's leadership until his father died, and his mother had to sue the union for the death benefits due her. Now, he's a proud member of Teamsters for a Democratic Union, whose fights against corruption and concessions he characterizes as "standing up for good, old-fashioned, middle-class values."

Robin Kohl, a loader/sorter at UPS in Minneapolis, says she long disliked the "fat cat salaries and corruption" in the Teamsters. It wasn't until negotiations for a national contract in 1990, however, that she got active. Dissatisfied with the settlement negotiated by national Teamster leaders, she made up a leaflet urging her co-workers to vote "No." Members of TDU then contacted her. Eight months ago she joined the national reform organization.

Bill Bowman, a longtime Teamster reformer and shop steward at UPS in St. Louis, also first became active fighting for a better contract. He later became committed to reform, he says, when he discovered that workers were losing grievances because Teamster officials were siding with management.

There is a long history of ad hoc "better contract" groups in the United Auto Workers. It wasn't until 1988, however, that notion of building a permanent reform movement began to

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take root, after a reformer took over the regional director's office near St. Louis. In 1986, the national officers of the UAW illegally manipulated an election to prevent the election as regional director of Jerry Tucker, a staff representative who had run against an incumbent. In 1988, a federal judge ordered a new election under US. Department of Labor supervision, which Tucker won handily. That same year, however, the UAW's Public Review Board, a panel of distinguished citizens set up to hear appeals in the union, ruled in another case that UAW president Owen Bieber could transfer or dismiss staff who run against incumbent national officers. The board ruled that such actions were justified because the UAW is a one-party institution not "unlike that found in many national governments in which a single political party controls the government, and the officials who formally make and administer the laws pursuant to which the country is governed are selected wholly by that party." As such, the board argued that UAW leaders had a right to expect absolute loyalty from those beneath them in the hierarchy. Those who behaved otherwise "would of necessity be derelict in their duties."

The effect of these events was to show that an opponent of the ruling party could win an regional election, but still be ostracized. Critics had to either shut up or go into opposition.

The opposition began to question the ethics of certain practices by union officials, and the questions have spread among the rank-and-file. Dillard Hargis, an assembly line worker at a GM plant in Wentzville, MO, attacks junkets taken by union officers at company expense. Richard Rios, president of Local 148 at McDonnell-Douglas's Long Beach, CA site, labels as a "conflict-of interest" the fact that his regional director sits on the board of a company that contracts for work from McDonnell Douglas. David Yettaw, president of Local 599 at Buick City, in Flint, MI, similarly attacks vice president Stephen Yokich for having a "personal interest" in the company that got a sole source contract to provide vision care to Ford workers in Michigan. Others complain about the increase in patronage positions while regular workers suffer wage or benefit losses.

Ron Maxwell, a worker at a Ford plant in Utica, MI, is representative of an increasing number of workers who believe that concessionary contracts are not due just to a tough economic climate, but also are due to corruption among union officials. He now believes that UAW officials have forgotten the average member; that they are only looking out for themselves. It is that sense of betrayal that fuels his support for reform and the New Directions Movement.

That seems to be the feeling of disgruntled members in every union in which a reform movement has started to grow. In their efforts towards reform lie their hopes for an effective voice at work, and an effective voice in government.

Peter Downs is a member of the UAW and a supporter of the New Directions Movement.

Just politics

Our text for this month is from the teachings of the Kennebunkport Caliph: "I'm certainly going into this as a dog-eat-dog fight. I will do what I have to do to be re-elected." You have been warned.

Best ideas of this campaign so far: Kerrey's national health insurance plan, Clinton's education loan plan, Larry Agran's urban policy and Eugene McCarthy's shorter work week.

Worst ideas of this campaign so far: Kerrey saying he wouldn't hesitate to use the military to fight the urban war on crime and Harkin's proposal to use the Army to guard small southern airports against drug runners. For a couple of liberals they're awful quick to suggest martial law. At least Kerrey's staffers were smart enough to say their boss didn't really mean it after mayors and others took issue.

Non-existent ideas of this campaign: An alternative to the war on drugs, America's domestic Vietnam; a decent housing proposal and cures for homelessness; real help for small business; ending America's drift towards dictatorship, and plans to empower neighborhoods and small communities so democracy and governance can return to the people.

Largest neglected constituency of this campaign: America's cities. Only Larry Agran seems ready to return to a program that worked: general revenue sharing. The *New York Times* reported following a meeting of the US Conference of Mayors: "After hearing pitches from the Democratic presidential contenders on how they would revive America's cities, dozens of mayors meeting here today seemed to agree on one thing: the single candidate who truly understands urban needs is Larry Agran."

Best neglected candidates of this campaign: Eugene McCarthy and Agran, who have been treated like dirt by party officials and the media, even though they've made more sense than many of the approved candidates.

Bill Clinton was early anointed Democratic front runner by the media, but consider this: In a mid-January Time/CNN matchup against George Bush, the "electable" Clinton got 31%, while Tom Harkin, who is allegedly too strident for the voters, got 27%. Kerrey got 28% and Brown got 25%. Mind you this was before the Gennifer Flowers story broke.

Another Time/CNN poll a few weeks earlier had Harkin, Kerrey, Brown and Clinton lumped within two percentage points of each other, with Brown ahead of Clinton and Harkin only one point behind.

As usual the perceptionistas of the press were reading a great deal into a very few percentage points. They were covering their druthers rather than the facts.

As we went to press the vaunted electability of Bill Clinton had become very much in doubt. The establishment media was working overtime to rescue their favorite Democrat, even to extent of not letting their readers peruse the Flowers phone tapes despite the fact that Clinton hadn't denied that it was his voice on the other end of the line. Editorialists spoke highly of Clinton's mushy responses on *60 Minutes*, and even that normally hard-hitting program failed to ask the governor about the tapes. And if he and Ms. Flowers weren't talking about an affair on those tapes, what misconduct was being discussed?

The media's protection of Clinton, of course, dates far before the current matter. He has long been the Washington elite's designated alternative to Bush.

During the current campaign, Clinton has gotten kid glove treatment from the press. Here are just a few of the items the major media has downplayed:

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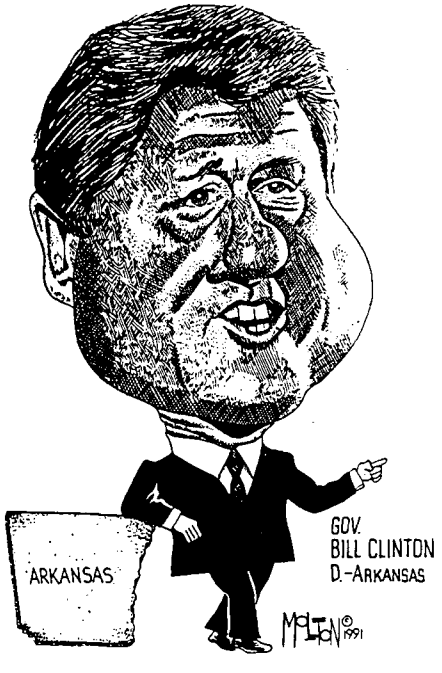
• *Clinton's labor problems.* Clinton has come under attack by his own state's AFL-CIO president who has sent around a report on Clinton's record that in summary says, "He stuck it to us." Bill Becker says labor should expect Clinton's help only 25-30% of the time.

• *Clinton's environmental record.* The League of Conservation Voters ranks Clinton last among the Dems on conservation issues.

• *Clinton's Willie Horton.* Shouldn't we know the facts of the Larry Dean Robertson case before it is highlighted in a Bush commercial next fall? According to Paul Greenberg, editorial page editor of the *Pine Bluff Commercial,* Robertson was released from prison early and proceeded shortly thereafter to commit a gruesome murder. The issue, however unfair, does go directly to the heart of Clinton's purported "electability."

• *What really has happened in Arkansas.* Eleanor Clift perceptively notes, "He could have trouble convincing people he's going to turn America around when he hasn't turned around Arkansas." What has actually happened in Arkansas is largely unknown, because the media has shown little interest in covering the story.

For example, a group opposing Clinton charged in New Hampshire TV ads that he had actually raised $1.5 billion in new taxes in his state. The Clinton campaign sent out letters to radio stations and newspapers warning that the FCC might require equal time for Clinton on the air. The campaign further argued that the sponsors of the ad were not "a legitimate player in the political process," whatever that means. It seemed to satisfy the media which has done little with the story.



Having not told us about Clinton's public record, the media, at press time, was busily explaining why we shouldn't know about his private record either. This became more difficult after the *Star,* a sleazy and unreliable grocery store tabloid (as opposed to your average sleazy and unreliable metropolitan daily), reported the Gennifer Flowers story.

Forget about the sex; the phone tapes -- the most recent allegedly made Jan. 16 -- are the critical point -- although many of the early stories we read failed even to mention them. After they were played at a news conference, media corporations like *CNN* and the *Washington Post* kept the contents secret, with the *Post* claiming that "segments of the excerpts could support either Flowers's version of events or Clinton's."

This grossly misleading précis ignored the discussion of a cover-up of *something.* Further, it failed to note important segments that dealt with matters other than the affair.

For example, when Flowers spoke of getting a job with the state government, the voice she alleged to be Clinton's says, "If they ever ask if you've talked to me about it, you can say no."

The male voice also describes Mario Cuomo as being a "mean son of a bitch" and when Flowers says, "I wouldn't be surprised if he didn't have some Mafioso connections," the reply is: "Well, he acts like one," followed by a chuckle.

Speaking of the press, the voice tells Flowers: "If they ever hit you with it, just say no and go on. There's nothing they can do. I expected them to look into it and come interview you. But if everybody is on record denying it, no problem." Richard Nixon couldn't have said it better.

By last week in January, neither the media nor the public had the facts to decided whether Flowers's story is true. If it is true, Clinton comes off as pretty seedy. The first *Star* piece and the tapes depicted not just an affair, but an attitude towards women and forthrightness that might be of more than passing interest to the voters. It also suggests criminal activity on the part of some of Clinton's enemies: Flowers claims her apartment was broken into and rifled.

In the end, as so often with political sex stories, it is not the affair that matters; it's what happens afterwards.

On the other hand, Clinton does play saxophone. It is a basic tenet of this publication that you shouldn't trust a politician who wouldn't really rather be something else. By this standard, poet laureate McCarthy, saxman Clinton and Saint Edmund all rank high.

Further news from the inner soul beat: In one of the New Hampshire debates, Tom Harkin said that when his daughter went to the movies the other night, he had her call from the theater, call when she was leaving, call from the pizza parlor where she went afterwards and call when leaving for home. Given that he took these precautions in the safe suburbs of Fairfax, Va., it may explain his inclination to declare martial law at southern airports.

Doublespeak awards

The Pentagon was last year's winner of the Committee on Public Doublespeak Award for such contributions as *armed situation* as a euphemism for war, and people who weren't killed but *degraded, neutralized, attrited, suppressed, eliminated, cleansed,* or *impacted.* A *healthy day of bombing* was achieved when more enemy *assets* were destroyed than expected and killing the enemy was *servicing the target.*

Rep. Newt Gingrich and the GOPAC Republican organization he leads got second place for advising GOP candidates to use words like *environment, peace, freedom, fair, flag, we/us, family and humane* to describe their own vision while attaching to their opponents words like *betray, sick, pathetic, lie, liberal, hypocrisy, permissive attitude, self-serving.*

We also learn from the committee that the Chief Kanim Middle School in Washington state does not have hallways but *behavior transition corridors.*

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Tom Harkin talks tough, but seems as ready as any politician to backtrack when the going gets tough. Two recent examples:

- Harkin opposed the super collider project in the Senate, but in Texas in December he said, "I'm saying as president, I'd get the money" for the project, upon which the eyes of Texas rest.
- On the same trip, his rhetoric on the free trade agreement with Mexico got a new twist: "I'd be all for fast-track if I were the president. I just don't trust Bush and than outfit and what kind of deal they're going to cook up."

Harkin *has* said, on the other hand, that he would institute a long-term ban on former trade negotiators going to work for foreign countries, as about a half-dozen of the Reagan-Bush negotiators have done.

And Harkin, to his credit, has held the line on the death penalty. Kerrey and Tsongas says they're for it.

But Harkin is still fudging on national health care, leaving Kerrey the major advocate of national health insurance. Says Dr. Jerry Liebman, long time advocate of a national healthcare system who met with Harkin's staff recently on the issue, Harkin's position is "nebulous, nebbish and nowhere."

It's all getting pretty confusing. The most conservative candidate has put forth the most radical education idea while several of the liberals still support the death penalty, a primitive concept that has virtually disappeared from western democracies.

It may have something to do with global dumbing, the same phenomenon that elects presidents who can't speak in whole sentences, and produces Iraqi dictators who can't count American troop strength, videotape packaging you can't unwrap, the Thomas hearings, Soviet conspirators who can't stage a decent coup, and ex-Communist reformers who drive their country into anarchy and starvation by believing everything some Harvard professor tells them. The main thing coming across is that while all the candidates want to be president, not many of them know why. They are merely misty reflections of our longings. Not even salesmen, they have become just consumers of our own gullibility.

Meanwhile, TV sound bites are down from over 40 seconds in 1968 to about 9 seconds. Asked to come up with a 9 second bite, Mark Russell offered the *New York Times* this one for George Bush: "It's great to be in New Hampshire. Jobs, jobs, jobs. God bless you. Good bye."

Unanswered question: If the Democrats lose again this year, will Ron Brown have the grace to resign from his disastrous tenure as party chair, under which the Democrats have lost their spirit, their ideas and any sense of direction?

Raymond Buckley, who won a successful race for alderman in Manchester, NH, last fall, knocked on 3000 doors during his campaign. He thinks he knows what's on the voters' mind. Buckley told the *New York Times,* "If there's one word to describe people it's *fear.* People are scared to death. They're afraid they can't pay their property taxes. They're afraid they'll lose their homes. They're afraid they'll lose their jobs."

Shortly before Mario Cuomo finally shut the lid on a presidential run, the *Village Voice* ran a story that pointed out that Cuomo, unlike many governors, happily takes honoraria for his speeches, to the tune last year about equal to his salary on the job: $130,000. But what was truly startling was the experience the City Club of Nashville had after they wangled an acceptance from Cuomo. After the $20,000 contract was signed and invitations sent out, Cuomo's agent, according to the *Voice,* demanded a private jet, which would have added another $20,000 to the gig. When the City Club refused, Cuomo backed down. Only then did the City Club get a call from a Cuomo aide asking such questions as: do you admit Jews and minorities? The club's president was glad to answer in the affirmative but found the timing strange. Then came a 9-page memo on the governor's stationery demanding everything from two glasses of water on the podium, to a curtain, velvet rope between himself and the audience, a US flag and state flag, and specifications for lighting and the location of the club sign. After all that, Cuomo canceled the engagement.

According to the Realist, Dan Quayle's minister, Col. Robert B. Thieme, Jr., preaches that "The Middle East is the focal point of the angelic conflict. Two-thirds of the Jews must die to fulfill the Bible prophecies about Armageddon." The only escape is to convert. This is only one of the little tidbits you may have missed reading *The Washington Post's* tedious puff piece on Quayle.

In northern California there's talk of secession and creation of a new state, led by conservative activists in some nearly all white counties. Which has led, naturally, to discussion of what the new state would be called. A few disgruntled San Franciscans have suggested "Baja Oregon" while advocates have come up with "Superior California."

Political trends: At a gay demonstration against California governor Pete Wilson's veto of a gay rights bill, San Francisco's conservative mayoral candidate Frank Jordan lost his shoe escaping from the crowd. According to the *San Francisco Weekly:*

"The combat clog was detained for a few hours [in the window of a bookstore] attractively displayed on a donut box, before it was confiscated by Act-Up. Then at Saturday night's Bad Cop/No Donut rally, a row of donuts was positioned on the street and ignited, creating a burning dough trail leading up to a large pile of donuts containing the offensive footwear. The final voodoo pyre made a magnificent flame." We just report it; we don't try to explain it.

The Weather Report

The other government

The Supreme Court has refused to review a lower court decision to fine the Christic Institute and two journalists $1 million for their lawsuit alleging that several US operatives were behind the 1984 bombing of a Nicaraguan contra headquarters

Former contra leader Eden Pastora, who was reportedly ready to break with the rebels, fled the scene with minor injuries but eight others were killed in the bombing.

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The court decision is seen by some activists, even those critical of aspects of the Christic case, as having a chilling effect on public interest law suits and further evidence of a cover-up of long-term political racketeering. The Christic suit was dismissed by a conservative judge who then fined the plaintiffs saying they had acted in bad faith.

The case, however, produced reams of depositions that provided invaluable information to Iran-Contra investigators and added considerably to public knowledge of mob politics.

With the Senate filibustered out of giving funding and House Speaker Foley pulling the required resolution, the October Surprise investigation is not quite dead, but very still. The designated Senate chair of the inquiry, Terry Sanford, however, is making do with discretionary subcommittee funds and seems intent on pursuing the matter.

The Federal Elections Commission has dropped its investigation of charges that the Bush campaign illegally worked with an independent organization on the notorious Willie Horton ad campaign.

> While people have a right to a fair trial, I think the American people have an overriding right to let these matters be decided behind closed doors. -- *George Bush on television coverage of the William Smith trial.*

Disturbing signs are cropping up that the White House is searching for some sort of military action to rev up its re-election campaign and get the public's mind off domestic matters, to wit: more than average Cuba-baiting and a *New York Times* article reporting Saudi pressure for covert action against Saddam Hussein. The latter could involve the reintroduction of American troops into the area.

Meanwhile *The Washington Post* reports speculation about a secret Saudi commitment to drive oil prices down until after the November election.

Steven Aftergood of the Federation of American Scientists has discovered that a file dated April 15, 1917, is the oldest document still classified in government custody. He's seeking to get it declassified.

Drug busts

The Minnesota Supreme Court broke through the propaganda fog on crack in December and ruled that stiffer penalties for crack possession than for the same amount of cocaine discriminates against blacks. The court was told that 96% of those arrested for crack possession were black while 80% of those arrested for cocaine were white. And despite what you may read in your local newspaper, the idea that crack is more addictive than cocaine is merely speculation. As Dr. Roy Pickens, acting director of the Addiction Research center of the National Institute of Drug Abuse, told the *New York Times,* there is no physiological evidence from any clinical trials to support this assumption. Nor is there clinical evidence that crack addiction is harder to break than addiction to powered cocaine.

The mediacracy

Readers of the Washington Post are familiar with the efforts of that paper to discredit the movie *JFK,* but may not be aware of similar efforts to dampen interest in a book, *Silent Coup,* that presents a view of Watergate quite different of that of the *Post.* The book describes Nixon as a dupe of John Dean and suggests that Alexander Haig planted stories with the *Post's* Bob Woodward to keep Nixon from pursuing policies opposed by the military. The *Post* vehemently attacked the book when it came out, which did not prevent it from rising to the best seller lists. *Silent Coup* says that Woodward covered up his earlier relationship with Haig.

The *Post* treatment of the book has attracted critical articles from Doug Ireland of the *Village Voice,* and from Robert Sherrill in the *Nation* who wrote: "We can expect to hear air escaping from the *Washington Post,* which has been increasingly inflated with arrogance since it crowned itself King of the Watergate Expose."

Even the reserved *Columbia Journalism Review* has weighed in with an article titled, "Was Nixon Duped? Did Woodward lie?" No conclusions, but between this book, news of Woodward's alleged intelligence past, questions about his book on William Casey, and now doubts about the softball series on Quayle he wrote with David Broder, the bloom is definitely off the erstwhile fair-haired boy of the *Post.*

Although the press periodically runs stories on discriminatory private clubs and politicians who belong to them, there has been an almost total blackout on the most dramatic example of all: California's Bohemian Grove, where the nation's male elite gathers to urinate on trees and engage in other acts of male political bonding. Every GOP president since Calvin Coolidge has been a member and current participants, according to *Extra!,* include George Bush, Henry Kissinger, James Baker and David Rockefeller. Walter Cronkite is also a member and his voice has been used for the Owl of Bohemia, part of the group's weird druidic-style ceremonies.

The best story on the Grove was in the November 1989 issue of *Spy,* written by Philip Weiss who sneaked in and described the odd and occasionally scary behavior there.

Now, *Extra!* reports that *People* magazine's Dirk Mathison made three surreptitious visits last July, aided by members of the Bohemian Grove Action Network. Among the activities he witnessed was a speech by former Navy Secretary John Lehman, who said the Pentagon estimated that 200,000 Iraqis were killed in the recent war. Other policy addresses were by Richard Cheney, Joseph Califano, and Elliott Richardson.

Mathesin, however, was recognized by an official of Time Warner (*People's* owner), who made him leave. Mathesin had plenty of material and turned in a story, but after an initially enthusiastic response, the piece was killed, just as early stories on the Grove for NPR and *Time* had been scotched.

Furthermore. . .

In 1990, the FDIC spent $733 million on private lawyers commissioned to recover funds pilfered by rogue S&L executives. When Congress inquired about the results, the FDIC's general counsel testified that they had recovered $29 for every dollar spent. But *Mother Jones's* Stephen Pizzo reports that under further congressional scrutiny, that figure dropped rather substantially -- to 51 cents on the dollar.

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There's more. Pressed by *Mother Jones* to account for the money, the FDIC revealed that the 51 cents figure includes not simply collected judgments but "settlements entered into" and settlements the agency was "confident would be collected." So how much has the FDIC actually collected? "We'll have to get back you on that one," FDIC told *MJ.*.

The University of Wisconsin's ban on hate speech has been declared unconstitutional by a federal court. The ban was an extreme example of the sort of speech censorship that has been sweeping college campuses.

In late January, the sheriff of Bristol, Va., committed suicide after a grand jury began investigating him for embezzlement. His modus operandi tells a great deal about why government costs so much. The sheriff was being sent prisoners by the federal and DC governments along with payments to cover costs. The reimbursements, however, were based on federal and DC standards. In DC it costs more to house a prisoner for a year than it does to send him to Harvard. But what cost $55 a day in DC, costs only $6 a day in Bristol, Va. The sheriff just pocketed the difference. Federal officials estimate that he diverted some $438,000 from DC alone. Instead of the sheriff being invited to Washington as a consultant, the case was sent to a grand jury.

The Washington Post, in its typically hard-hitting, skeptical approach to official statements, said:

"Costs are low because the jail grows its own food, with inmate labor, on a jail-run farm, officials said."

That would suggest DC prisoners are being fed $49-a-day meals.

Feedback

Donna Allen sends us a copy of a Herblock cartoon that shows a group of Republicans sitting at a table under a map of Cuba and the signs "Hot Pursuit!" and "No Let-Up!" The men are reading documents labeled "strategy" and "confidential" and one of them is saying, "Who said anything about driving out Castro? We're talking about Kennedy." The cartoon was dated February 26. 1963.

We have received a copy of a chain letter that recounts the story of a woman who had lunch at a Neiman-Marcus restaurant, The Hedges, last November. She had some chocolate cookies that were so good, she asked for the recipe. Informed that there was a charge of "two-fifty," the woman said fine, she would charge it. She not only got the recipe but a month later a bill from Neiman-Marcus for $250. In retaliation, she started the chain letter that contains the recipe for NM's $250 cookies, which she says, "are a dream."

Road signs

A Census Bureau analysis has estimated that some 70,000 Iraqi civilians have died since the Iraqi Massacre due to war-related causes.

Follow the money: A study by the *Regardie's* business magazine in Washington, has found that a number of major think tanks have received large sums from Japanese sources. Over the years 1986-90, the following have received a million dollars or more from the Japanese: Institute for International Economics, the Center for Strategic and International Studies, and Brookings Institution. The American Enterprise Institute has received $846 thousand. All four agree that claims about Japanese unfair trade practices have been exaggerated and that the US should not resort to protective measures in dealing with the trade deficit.

Black enrollment in college, after years of backwards or stagnant movement, took a substantial leap forward between 1988 and 1990 according to the American Council on Education. In 1988, only a quarter of blacks graduating from high school went to college; in 1990 the figure was one-third. Latino enrollment, however, is still at 1980's levels (less than 30%) and the percent of black faculty also remains largely unchanged (4.5% of total faculty).

Of the ten million people worldwide infected with the HIV virus, sixty percent are in Africa, most in the 25-40 age bracket. PNS correspondent A.R.M. Bubu reports that "AIDS is now reversing what few social gains -- mainly in mortality rates and education -- African countries have made since

Blatant self-promotion

For the second year in a row, a *Progressive Review* story has been cited as one of the top censored stories of the year by Project Censored. "Collateral Damage: What We've Lost Already" (March 91) was chosen, along with stories in *Editor & Publisher* and the *San Francisco Bay Guardian*, for coverage of the war that broke through official censorship.

The ten top stories cited by Project Censored, after culling more 700 entries were:

1. CBS and NBC's spiking of uncensored videotape that substantially contradicted administration claims that civilian damage from the Iraqi bombing was light. *(San Francisco Bay Guardian)*
2. The censorship of the war, the category in which the *Review* was cited.
3. The failure of the media to explain how bad the national deficit was and why the economy went into a tailspin in 1991. *(Philadelphia Inquirer and USA Today)*
4. PBS's *Frontline's* coverage of the cover-up of the S&L crisis so it would not threaten George Bush's candidacy in 1988.
5. The sealing of court documents concerning an investigation into possible fraud and bribery in securing defense contracts. *(Common Cause magazine* and the *St. Louis Journalism Review)*
6. The satellite photos taken in September 1990 that revealed no evidence of the massive Iraqi threat to Saudi Arabia claimed by George Bush. *(St. Petersburg Times* an *In These Times)*
7. The erosion of the Freedom of Information Act. *(Common Cause* magazine)
8. Corporate America's anti-environmental campaign. *(E Magazine* and *Greenpeace News)*
9. The Inslaw software theft. *(In These Times* and *Random Lengths)*
10. The Bush family's conflicts of interest. *(San Francisco Examiner, Santa Rosa Press Democrat, Spin,* and *The Texas Observer.*

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independence. And since African agriculture is still labor intensive, AIDS's deaths will cause output to drop to catastrophically low levels while millions already face death from famine."

Field Notes

The State of the World 1992: The Worldwarch Institute's 9th annual report concludes that the world today is either in the early stages of an environmental revolution or on the verge of environmental collapse and economic decline. The report calls for an end of the fossil fuel age and the creation of solar-based energy systems, new transportation networks that reduce automobile use, redistribution of land and wealth, equality of the sexes and a rapid shift to smaller families. The report argues that a sustainable economy would create more jobs than it would eliminate. Other points:

- Three-quarters of the world's birds are threatened with extinction or have declining populations.
- Seventy-five percent of the varieties of the world's major food crops are extinct.
- One Amazon tribe has disappeared each year since 1900.

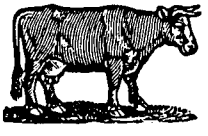
The report is published by W. W. Norton and costs $19.95

Generic rail: As we suggested some time ago, at least some of the peace dividend is going to be swallowed up by high-tech solutions to domestic problems such as transportation, thus keeping defense contractors in business. An example is the enthusiasm for magnetic levitation rail service. Generic Rail Concepts is an organization that believes a better alternative is to upgrade and expand current rail technology. It makes a number of proposals such as freezing current rights of way, increasing the amount of freight on rail and exempt unused or unprofitable railway plant from taxation. [GRC, PO Box 9289, South Lake Tahoe, CA 95731

Computers for environmental organizations: Apple has donated a hundred personal computers and printers to be awarded to regional, state and local environmental organizations by the Environmental Support Center. To get an application, write ESC, 1731 Conn. Ave NW #200, DC 20009. 202-328-7813.

Saving jobs: When Ralston-Purina closed down the Braun Bakery in Pittsburgh, neighborhood groups, regional investors and bakery workers joined to create a new firm called City Pride Bakery. The new corporation, based on employee stock ownership, will provide 300 jobs, 50 more than under Ralston-Purina. [Federation for Industrial Retention and Renewal, 3411 W. Diversey, Chicago IL 60647]

Cows for Kids: The People's Republic of Takoma Park, Md., (as that progressive little burg is affectionately known) has started a program to buy 20 cows, 60 acres of land, a barn, fencing and six months worth of feed and vaccine for Santa Marta, El Salvador, its sister city. To help raise money, Michael & the Archangels have produced a nifty tape of Latin-flavored songs including "Nuclear Blues" and "Desert Flower," an antiwar anthem inspired by the Persian Gulf war. Politically correct, but easy listening as well. Send $6 to Cows for Kids, 310 Tulip Avenue, Takoma Park, MD 20912.



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